

South Bend Tribune

OPINION *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Viewpoint: Health care for all is needed — no exceptions

Nicole MacLaughlin South Bend Tribune

April 15, 2019, 5:00 p.m. ET

Here in Indiana, families are the cornerstone of our community. But, you wouldn't know that if you walked the halls of the state capitol or paid attention to what our president is doing to our nation's healthcare. If we expect our elected leaders to put families first, it starts at home. It starts with caring for each other and not letting leaders put politics before the health, safety and well-being of their constituents.

During the month of March, faith leaders and community members of diverse race and faith backgrounds gathered for weekly vigils at Indiana's Statehouse. We stood together to lift up our faith values of care and inclusion for all Hoosiers and called on our elected officials to put Hoosier families first.

The "Families First" platform we presented included four main elements required for a stronger Indiana and healthier nation: a fair democracy to make voting easier for working families, a caring economy where we take care of each other in hard times, restorative justice to prevent mass incarceration and health care for all.

We deserve to be confident that the people we send to Washington, D.C., to represent us will understand our challenges, resist partisan attacks and fight for all Hoosiers. Instead, they are enlisting our state legislature into their games — like the Medicaid work requirement — hurting Indiana's working families, especially women and people of color.

President Trump recently pushed for complete repeal of the Affordable Care Act after the 2020 elections — a clear indication that he'd rather take away health care

coverage from working families and instead, continue passing policies that benefit only the wealthy few. But, in America, no matter what you look like or where you come from, shouldn't we all be able to take care of our families and protect our health?

Looking for a free mini puzzle? Play the USA TODAY Quick Cross now.

Here in Indiana, Gov. Eric Holcomb tacked a work requirement onto Medicaid benefits that will at best complicate access to care for the chronically ill and increase costs in Indiana. Hoosiers have a strong work ethic, strongly invested in the dignity of work. However, adding a work requirement targets people who are temporarily unemployed or unable to work to take care of themselves and their families, kicking them when they are down.

Six years ago, I became a breast cancer survivor. I was a healthy 42-year-old, working mother of two girls, 7 and 10. My husband and I had always chosen the health plan that cost us the least amount of out-of-pocket expense and let us see the doctors we wanted. We trusted our insurance would be there when we needed it. Then, one day, I looked in the mirror and saw an unfamiliar shape. It was a lump. Within days, I was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer, an uncommon and very aggressive form. I was terrified and overwhelmed by the choices I faced.

What would happen to my kids if I wasn't around to care for them? What if I couldn't work? What if I become too much of a liability for my medical insurance company? Would another insurance company take us on? However, amidst all the terrifying uncertainty, I was relieved to find out that our insurance company couldn't drop us and couldn't turn us down or charge more because of my cancer. That's because, two years before I got cancer, the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (the ACA or Obamacare) was passed.

To be clear: We need to lift the standards for health care, and other critical policies that put families first so that nobody has to worry about losing health care, struggling to make ends meet to feed our families, or any other barriers to prosperity to live whole, happy lives. We also need courageous leaders willing to stand up for working

families instead of ripping the rug out from under us and providing health care for all and other necessary safety nets.

It is in our power to create something better and we can start by building a better Indiana. That is why I and other faith leaders prayed at the Statehouse every week for the past month. It is why we will continue to stand for our “Families First” agenda. No matter what faith you practice, or if you practice no faith, I will save a place for you to join me.